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ALONZO DEON JOHNSON and DARRYL THOMPSON

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

ALONZO DEON JOHNSON, ) No. Civ. S 03-2063 JAM JFM P  
)  
Petitioner, ) **NOTICE OF APPEAL; REQUEST FOR**  
) **CERTIFICATE OF APPEALABILITY;**  
v. ) **ORDER**  
)  
CLAUDE E. FINN, Warden, )  
)  
Respondent. )  
)  
)

DARRYL THOMPSON, ) No. Civ. S 04-2208 JAM JFM P  
)  
Petitioner, ) **NOTICE OF APPEAL; REQUEST FOR**  
) **CERTIFICATE OF APPEALABILITY;**  
v. ) **ORDER**  
)  
TOM L. CAREY, Warden, )  
)  
Respondent. )  
)  
)

NOTICE is hereby given that petitioners, ALONZO DEON JOHNSON and DARRYL THOMPSON, appeal to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit from the district court's order adopting in part and denying in part the findings and recommendations of the magistrate judge, and the judgment entered on March 23, 2010.

Mssrs. Johnson and Thompson also request this court issue the certificate of appealability lodged herewith. See 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c);

1 Fed. R. App. P. 22(b); see also *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 483  
 2 (2000) (AEDPA provisions for certificate of appealability apply to  
 3 habeas appeals initiated after effective date of statute).<sup>1</sup>

#### 4 **STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPEALABILITY**

5 To obtain a certificate of appealability, a habeas corpus  
 6 petitioner must make a "substantial showing of the denial of a  
 7 constitutional right." 28 U.S.C. §2253(c)(2). The petitioner "need  
 8 not show that he should prevail on the merits." *Barefoot v. Estelle*,  
 9 463 U.S. 880, 893 n.4 (1983). A claim warrants issuance of a  
 10 certificate if it presents a "question of some substance," i.e., an  
 11 issue (i) that is "'debatable among jurists of reason'"; (ii) "'that a  
 12 court could resolve in a different manner'"; (iii) that is "'adequate  
 13 to deserve encouragement to proceed further'"; or (iv) that is not  
 14 "squarely foreclosed by statute, rule, or authoritative court decision,  
 15 or . . . [that is not] lacking any factual basis in the record." *Id.*,  
 16 at 893 n.4, 894.<sup>2</sup> As the Supreme Court clarified:

17 At the COA stage . . . , a court need not make a definitive  
 18 inquiry into [the merits of the habeas petition]. As we have  
 19 said, a COA determination is a separate proceeding, one  
 20 distinct from the underlying merits. The Court of Appeals  
 21 should have inquired whether a "substantial showing of the  
 22 denial of a constitutional right" had been proved. Deciding  
 23 the substance of an appeal in what should only be a threshold  
 24 inquiry undermines the concept of a COA. The question is the  
 25 debatability of the underlying constitutional claim, not the  
 26 resolution of that debate.

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24 <sup>1</sup> The Rules Governing Section 2254 Proceedings were recently  
 25 amended to require district courts "to issue or deny a certificate of  
 26 appealability *when it enters a final order adverse to the applicant.*"  
 Rule 11, Rules Governing Section 2254 Proceedings (2009) (emphasis  
 added).

27 <sup>2</sup> *Barefoot* involved the showing required, under pre-AEDPA law, for  
 28 issuance of a certificate of probable cause. The same standard applies  
 under § 2253(c). *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 484-85.

1 *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 342 (2003) (citations omitted).

2 **ISSUE TO BE RAISED ON APPEAL**

3 The issue sought to be raised on appeal is whether petitioners'  
4 constitutional rights were violated by the prosecutor's improper use of  
5 peremptory challenges to exclude African-American jurors.

6 The magistrate judge conducted an evidentiary hearing in this  
7 case, during which the prosecutor testified as to the circumstances  
8 surrounding his exercise of peremptory challenges against three  
9 prospective African-American jurors. After post-hearing briefs were  
10 filed, the magistrate judge issued thorough and thoughtful findings and  
11 recommendations, 43 pages in length. While he found that the  
12 prosecutor had legitimate, race-neutral reasons for excusing two  
13 prospective African-American jurors, he concluded that the prosecutor's  
14 stated reasons for excluding the third prospective African-American  
15 juror, Mr. Willie Lee Jones, III, were a pretext for eliminating him  
16 from the jury because of his race. The magistrate judge examined each  
17 and every reason the prosecutor claimed (both at voir dire and during  
18 the evidentiary hearing) was the basis for the challenge, including  
19 that Mr. Jones was a bad speller, which he concluded was "trivial in  
20 the extreme."<sup>3</sup> After conducting a comparative juror analysis in  
21 painstaking detail, the magistrate judge concluded that the results  
22 "fatally undermine[d] the credibility of the prosecutor's stated  
23 justification for excusing Mr. Jones and demonstrate[d] that Mr. Jones'  
24 youth, marital status, residence and poor spelling could  
25 not have genuinely motivated the prosecutor to strike him." (CR #62 at

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26  
27 <sup>3</sup> Even though the prosecutor "placed great weight on the fact that  
28 Mr. Jones could not spell, even misspelling the title of his own job,"  
(CR #62 at 20), this Court did not mention that factor in its March 23,  
2010 order.

22).

This Court, without the benefit of observing the prosecutor testify, appears to have rejected the magistrate judge's credibility finding on this issue, *but see Snyder v. Louisiana*, 552 U.S. 472, 477 (2008) (emphasizing that in reviewing *Batson* challenges, "determinations of credibility and demeanor lie peculiarly within a trial judge's province . . . [and] that in the absence of exceptional circumstances, we would defer to the trial court"), and, in its three-and-a-half page order, concluded that petitioners failed to provide evidence that the prosecutor removed Mr. Jones from the jury based on purposeful racial discrimination. Because the issue is at least "debatable among jurists of reason," the certificate of appealability should issue.

**CONCLUSION**

We request the Court issue the Certificate Of Appealability lodged herewith.

DATED: March 23, 2010

Respectfully submitted,

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Federal Defender

/s/ David M. Porter  
DAVID M. PORTER  
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Attorney for Petitioners  
ALONZO DEON JOHNSON AND DARRYL THOMPSON

**O R D E R**

Under authority of Title 28, United States Code section 2253(c), and Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 22(b)(1), the Court hereby certifies that there is cause for an appeal in the above-entitled case. Accordingly, a certificate of appealability is hereby granted as to the following issue: whether petitioners' constitutional rights were violated by the prosecutor's improper use of peremptory challenges to exclude African-American jurors.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED: March 23, 2010

/s/ John A. Mendez  
U.S. District Court Judge